

Joe Horlen

Interview conducted by Mark Liptak in 2005. Originally published at White Sox Interactive in 2005.

At first glance it would be easy to think ‘average,’ ‘mediocre,’ ‘journeyman.’ The 113-113 is Joe Horlen’s lifetime White Sox record. Joe’s major league record is 116-117. Was Joe ‘average?’ ‘mediocre?’ a ‘journeyman?’ If you said ‘yes’ to any of those questions you’d be wrong, very wrong.

‘Average’ pitchers don’t have seven straight seasons in double figure wins. ‘Mediocre’ pitchers don’t have five straight seasons with an ERA of under three... three of those five years with an ERA of under two and a half...one of those years with a sensational ERA of 1.88.

‘Journeyman’ pitchers don’t lead the American League in win percentage, shutouts and ERA like Joe did in 1967.

Further, those type pitchers don’t walk just 554 hitters in over 2,000 innings of work, with 65 of those of the intentional variety. Oh, did I mention the no-hitter Horlen threw? How about the pair of complete game two-hitters?? Or the seven complete game three-hitters???

Horlen’s problem, like his teammates Tommy John and Gary Peters, was that in his later years with the Sox, particularly 1968, 1969 and 1970, the team was so awful that it threw won / lost career records out of whack. The other problem was that throughout most of Joe’s years, the Sox didn’t hit very well. Put Horlen on a team like Detroit or Minnesota and his numbers would have been dramatically different.

Joe Horlen was not your ‘average’ pitcher.

Sports were a part of Joe’s life almost from the beginning growing up in San Antonio, Texas. I spoke with Joe relaxing on a rainy Texas morning. Since retiring from baseball with a World Series ring in 1972 with the Oakland A’s, Horlen spent many seasons working as a pitching coach, mainly for the San Francisco Giants organization. Now Horlen scouts in the San Antonio area for that club, travels a great deal and plays golf almost daily. He is considered one of the best major league players to ever hit the links.

Life is good for this supposedly ‘mediocre’ right hander.

Horlen had a lot to say about his days on the South Side... from his unusual first game in the pro’s, to losing a no-hitter and the game within a 10 minute span in July 1963, to losing out to the Yankees in 1964, to the amazing 1967 season... a year where he should have won the Cy Young award and the Sox should have copped the pennant, only to fall short on both counts, along with his memories of the last no-hitter a Sox pitcher has ever thrown in Chicago and why the Sox released him just before the start of the strike in 1972. Over 10 years’ worth of memories, all on a rainy Texas morning.

ML: Joe how did you and baseball get intertwined. I'm assuming you played it as a kid but I also know you played other sports including football didn't you?

JH: Growing up I played basketball, football and golf. We didn't have a high school baseball team but we did have American Legion baseball. My dad was a player in a Sunday beer league. He'd allow my brother and I two soda's a Sunday while he'd drink a case of beer. I thought about that a lot! (laughing) That's where it all started. My brother and I just started throwing the ball around. When I was young I remember my dad building a pitching mound in the backyard and hanging a tire on a rope by the shed that we had. My mother gave us an old rug and we put it over the tire and just threw to it all day long. My brother and I played something every day.

My first organized baseball was the YMCA League that we had. I was about 10 or 11 years old. My dad coached it and he was my coach from that time until I was about 21 years old. When I was 14 I joined the Pony League club that we had. I was on the first team to ever win the National Pony League Championship which was back in 1952.

ML: You were at Oklahoma State University when you signed a contract with the Sox. Can you tell me a little about how the Sox scouted you and why you signed with them? Hall of Fame pitcher Ted Lyons was a big part of it wasn't he?

JH: I was there for two years and I know Ted came around to look at all of us but he didn't sign me. OSU was in Omaha for the College World Series and a Sox scout named Jack Sheehan was there. I pitched in a couple of those games and in the championship game I warmed up three times but never got in. Jack talked with me and all he asked was that before I signed with anyone that I'd promise that he'd be the last person I talked with. I said "OK." Five teams contacted me while we were there. The Reds seemed to really want me.

After we won the tournament the team had a little party and I didn't get to see Jack until about 2:30 or three in the morning. I knocked on his door and the first thing he said to me was "I thought maybe you'd forget your promise." I said "no" and we talked and ate some hamburgers. Jack made me an offer where I'd get a signing bonus and then for the next five years I'd get a little more money every season. So I signed with the White Sox.

(Author's Note: Oklahoma State surprised the college baseball world by winning the 1959 championship. OSU beat Arizona 5-3 in the championship game. They finished the season with a record of 27-5. The Cowboys were 17-3 in the Big Eight Conference. They went 5-1 at the College World Series)

ML: Your pro career started in Lincoln, Nebraska later in 1959. You went 1-9 and walked 47 hitters in 91 innings. Obviously pro ball was a big change from college wasn't it?

JH: It certainly was. There were some extenuating circumstances though that caused the 1-9 record. In my first game I pitched six innings then left when I got hit in the arm by a line drive. Four days later I threw a complete game and won 2-1. Four days after that I pitched another complete game but lost 2-1. I had a day off then came in to pitch three innings. One day later I

pitched again and threw 14 innings. I added it up and when it was over in 13 days I threw 41 innings! My arm wasn't sore or anything but it was just dead for the rest of the year!

ML: By 1961 however you turned it around, going 12-9 with a 2.51 ERA for San Diego when the Sox purchased your contract on August 28, 1961. What was the secret, how did things change for you in such a quick period of time?

JH: After that start in 1959 I was sent to the Florida Instructional League. It had just started and you were watched better. I was able to get the rest I needed between starts and I don't think the pitchers were allowed to throw more than four or five innings.

Then I went to Charleston, South Carolina and had some trouble with my arm. The Sox flew me back to Chicago for tests. It was discovered that I was pinching some nerves in my arm. The doctor gave me some exercises, which I did religiously and never had any trouble again. From there I went back to the Florida Instructional League in the winter of 1960 where I got more experience.

The Sox then invited me to spring training and I pitched like nine or 10 innings. I did well, even won a game, and started to think maybe I had a chance. Turned out I was the first guy cut and went to San Diego (laughing). While I was there my manager Bob Kuzava really helped me. (*Author's Note: Kuzava pitched for the White Sox in 1949 and 1950 and was in the big leagues from 1946 through 1957.*) Until Bob worked with me I never had a plan for pitching to hitters. He got me to throw strikes and keep the ball low in the strike zone. The other thing that really helped me was when Herb Score was sent to San Diego to rehab from an injury. (*Author's Note: Score pitched for the White Sox from 1960 through 1962. He was in the major leagues starting in 1955.*) I was never a real big guy and I saw how hard Score worked out. I followed him and got a lot stronger. I also did a lot of running.

ML: You made your debut in Minnesota on September 4, 1961 in the second game of a twin bill and it was a great one as you got the win in relief against the Twins. (*Author's Note: The Sox won 9-5. Cal McLish got the start.*) What do you remember about that first game?

JH: I had just turned 24 and was pitching in the major leagues. Nellie Fox came up to me before I faced my first hitter and told me that he liked to hit the ball up the middle so be ready. Sure enough he hit a shot right back to me that I was able to glove and that's how it started. (*Author's Note: The hitter was Zoilo Versalles. Horlen worked four innings allowing two hits and no runs.*)

ML: I discovered something else that I'm sure didn't make things any easier for you in that debut. You are one of only a handful of major league players to have made a debut wearing a uniform that had no number on it, not even '0' and it didn't have your name on it either. Just a blank jersey! What was that all about? I have read the Sox simply didn't have any jerseys made up for you. (*Author's Note: The only other major league player that I've been able to find that had this happen to him was the Reds Eric Davis on May 19, 1984*)

JH: I was actually supposed to start the next day's game. Because of that the Sox felt they were going to have some time getting a jersey for me. I was sitting in the bullpen wearing my warm up jacket because I was a little embarrassed and the guys were giving it to me. Then during the middle of the game the phone rings and Al Lopez (*Author's Note: White Sox manager*) said to get me up and ready. The Sox had used a lot of pitchers in the series right before going to Minnesota and they were shorthanded. (*Author's Note: It was a five game series in Washington that had two double headers in a span of three days. The Sox would win four of the five games played.*) So I go in and right as I'm ready to throw my first pitch in the majors, Twins manager Sam Mele called time and went out to talk with the home plate umpire. (*Author's Note: Mele played for the White Sox in 1952 and 1953.*) Mele is talking and then he points to me and shrugs his shoulders like 'who the heck is that guy?' Everyone got a good laugh out of it including myself and it might have helped me since it relieved the tension.

ML: You moved into the rotation on a semi-regular basis in 1962. Al Lopez was the Sox manager and Ray Berres was his pitching coach. How did those two men affect your career, and what was it like to play for "The Senor?"

JH: Ray actually worked with me and talked with me more than Al. Ray was an absolute stickler for mechanics. I didn't know how to set up a hitter. Ray worked me with on this. He showed me how to use my pitches, to keep them low in the strike zone and in a sense let hitters get themselves out. He'd watch you when you were throwing on the sidelines and he'd keep reminding you about little things... things that made a big difference, like your arm swing, staying on top of the ball and the position of your body. At that time I had a sinker and a cut fastball. I had a curve but didn't control it very well. Years later I found a better way to throw it and control it from Tommy John. "T.J." got it from "Whitey" Ford one day and it worked well for me.

ML: 1963 was the breakthrough year for you 21 starts, 11 wins and an ERA of 3.27. Was it simply that you needed the time to get your feet on the ground in the big leagues, to get to know the hitters and to trust your stuff? Maybe confidence is a good word for it.

JH: I think you're correct. I know I had more confidence and I was more aware of the hitters. It wasn't just me. Bob Locker for example would keep a notebook of hitters and would check back with it during a game. By the way I faced Bob in the last conference game I ever pitched for Oklahoma State. Bob pitched for Iowa State and he beat me 1-0 in a game that was probably over in less than an hour and a half.

ML: A game on July 29, 1963 also was the beginning of what I thought was an undeserving tag applied to you... that of a 'hard luck' pitcher. That game in Washington saw you head to the 9th inning with a no-hitter but you were only leading 1-0 at the time. Talk me through the emotions

that a pitcher has when he's in that situation. You had to know about the no-hitter yet adding to the pressure was the fact that you didn't have a comfortable lead. You couldn't relax. (*Author's Note: The only Sox run off Steve Ridzik scored in the 6th inning when Pete Ward hit into a double play.*)

JH: I was certainly aware of the no-hitter. Earlier in my career I had come close before, I think I gave up a hit in the 8th inning. Honestly I was just trying to win the game; I was just trying to keep throwing strikes. I remember when I went out to pitch the 7th inning, the home plate umpire Ed Hurley was standing with the other umpires by third base. Now pitchers hated it when Hurley was behind the plate. He had the smallest strike zone in the league, and that night I walked three or four guys which were a lot for me. (*Author's Note: Horlen walked five in 8.2 innings of work.*) Hurley called out to me as I went to the mound, "Joe I know you've got a no-hitter going, just get it close and I'll help you out." He gave me one pitch! (laughing.)

Talking about Hurley reminded me of the time Johnny Buzhardt got into trouble with him in spring training. Johnny was pitching and we all told him about Hurley and that whatever you do, don't show any anger or emotion towards him or he'd make you pay. So John starts the game by throwing a strike but Hurley calls it a ball. Johnny didn't say anything but kind of looked for a second. He throws another pitch, it's in the same place and again Hurley calls it a ball. Johnny threw up his arms and just glared at him. We're on the bench thinking 'oh-oh!' Johnny threw 20 straight balls! (laughing) And then it started to rain and the game got rained out or else Johnny would have been out there all day and never would have thrown a strike!

ML: In that 9th inning you got Jim King to ground out, so you were two outs away. The next hitter was Chuck Hinton who singled up the middle. The ball wasn't hit well but it was in the right place. The no-hitter's gone but you still have a chance for the win. Emotionally was it hard to stay in the game? I mean you came so close.

JH: I just missed getting Hinton's grounder. It was a little to the left side of the field. That's the way it is. I had to keep concentrating because I didn't have a 4-0 lead. I had to try to win the game.

ML: "Bobo" Osborne was next and he grounded out from Nellie Fox to Tommy McCraw. OK you're one out away from the win. Up steps Don Locke, a power hitter but a guy you struck out the six previous times you pitched to him. You had been pitching around him that night walking him twice. According to the research you apparently hung a curve and Locke hit it out to win the game for the Senators 2-1. Looking back was that the biggest disappointment as a pitcher you ever experienced? To have lost a no-hitter and then the game all within a few minutes.

JH: To be honest I was more concerned with losing the game. I remember walking off the mound and there were a bunch of photographers by the dugout. They were there in case I got the no-hitter. I just walked right past them; I was oblivious to everything else.

ML: If there was any doubt that you were a bona fide major league pitcher it was erased in 1964 when you led the league with a 1.88 ERA and went 13-9 for a Sox team that fought to the last weekend for the pennant. The Sox won 98 games and finished one game behind the Yankees. Joe

can a pitcher get on a roll for an entire season because it looked like you were. You only allowed 54 runs (44 earned) in almost 211 innings of work.

JH: I think you can. That year I had a lot of movement on my fastball, it was sinking but everyone was concerned about my curve. So I'd throw my fastball just off the plate and let the hitters swing and get themselves out. I didn't walk a lot of hitters but if I had to in certain spots I'd pitch around guys. I wasn't about to get beat by a guy if there was someone else coming up that I thought I could get out.

ML: The Sox, to their credit, finished the season winning nine straight games. There wasn't any doubt was there that you guys were going to catch New York and play the Cardinals in the World Series?

JH: We thought we were going to win, all of us were just trying to win as many games as we could. Come to think of it, I don't remember anybody coming around to ask us how many tickets we'd need for the series. That may have been deliberate on the part of Al Lopez to keep things low-key.

ML: When New York finally clinched on the next to last day of the season what was the mood in the clubhouse? I mean the Sox came so very close, that had to be agonizing wasn't it? Jim Landis told me that he knows some of the guys off that team still haven't gotten over that feeling.

JH: I stayed calm afterwards. I guess I accepted my fate. I was fortunate with my career that at least I'd have a chance to get to a World Series but even if I didn't I would have felt the same way. I always tried to keep calm whatever happened to me.

ML: 1965 and 1966 had to be frustrating years for you personally and for most of the Sox pitchers. You look at your numbers, 13-13 in 1965 with an ERA of 2.88, and then in 1966 you had a losing mark, 10-13 despite an ERA of 2.43. Your teammate Gary Peters led the league with an amazing ERA of 1.98 yet only went 12-10. Did you ever think to yourself, 'man if I was playing on the Tigers or Twins I'd easily win 20 games a year?'

JH: It never really bothered me. I was just happy to be playing in the major leagues. I couldn't worry about what if. I was just concentrating on being as prepared as I could be and getting hitters out.

ML: 1967 was the closest the Sox have come to a World Series in 38 years (*Author's Note: Because back in 1967 there were no playoffs, if you won the American League you went to the World Series.*) But considering the way the team played in 1966 not much was expected of you guys was it? (*Author's Note: The Sox went 83-79-1 in 1966*)

JH: No, not much was expected. That was Eddie Stanky's second year as manager.

ML: Maybe this is a good time to ask about what it was like playing for Eddie. He certainly was a lot different from Al Lopez.

JH: I learned more about baseball from Eddie than any other manager I ever played for. He was tough; some guys just didn't get along with him. I just tried to stay away from him as much as I could! (laughing) Eddie would walk up and down the dugout during a game and he'd often stop by a guy and ask him "what's the count?" If you didn't know it you'd be fined 25 dollars. What I'd do is sit on the very top step of the dugout. If Eddie was going to walk in front of me, he'd have to go on the field to do it. (laughing)

But Eddie also had a good side. He often sent me a Christmas card and shortly before he died he sent me a series of pictures from my no-hitter game. I was pitching to Norm Cash and Eddie enclosed a note saying that he just found these and thought that I'd like to have them.

ML: He did have one other thing going for him I guess. That was the offer to you pitchers that for a complete game with 21 ground ball outs, he'd buy you a new suit of clothes.

JH: It didn't have to be outs; just as long as you pitched a complete game and got 21 ground balls he'd buy you a three hundred dollar suit. For that time that was a lot of money. I guess he got me five suits, Gary (Peters) got two and Tommy (John) got one.

Eddie also had a deal with the hitters, especially the guys who could run like Don Buford, Tommy McCraw and Tommy Agee. What Eddie would do is that if there was a guy on second base with less than two outs, if they could get to third base, like on a ground ball to the other side, he'd buy the runner a new pair of shoes. Man some of those guys had some stylish shoes!

ML: By May 20, 1967 the Sox already had a 10 game winning streak and a record of 20-9. The pitching throughout that season was outstanding wasn't it?

JH: It was and we were a close group. We had a good rapport with each other. We'd go out after games or sit around and talk baseball.

ML: Four members of that club, yourself, Gary Peters, Tommy Agee and Ken Berry were selected to the All-Star team that July. What do you remember about it?

JH: What I remember is a funny story between me and Carl Yastrzemski. I'm in the clubhouse before the game relaxing and reading the paper by my locker. I had the paper in front of me and it basically blocked my vision. I glanced down and I saw these feet wearing a pair of shower shoes that had 'Yaz' written on them right in front of me. I just had on a pair of shorts and my shower shoes at the time. So I put down the paper and there's Carl looking at me. Now I was never a big guy to start with. I was six feet maybe 175 pounds and by July I've already lost weight. Carl looks me over and says, "You mean that friggin' skinny, shallow body has been getting me out all season?" I laughed and said "yea and it's gonna *keep* getting you out!" (laughing)

ML: At the end of August, the beginning of September the Sox went into Boston for what was at that time, the biggest series of the season. As a backdrop to it the Red Sox players and fans were angry at Sox manager Eddie Stanky over his comments about Yastrzemski. (*Author's Note: On June 5 Stanky was quoted as saying, "he may be an All-Star from the neck down, but in my book he's a moody ballplayer. And I don't like moody ballplayers."*) Red Sox coach Eddie Popowski said Boston would 'knock the tar' out of the Sox. Boston fans threw garbage at you guys during the games but the Sox won three of four... you handled Jim Lonborg 4-1 in the Saturday "Game of the Week" on national TV. I imagine that was a tough series for you guys because of Stanky's comments wasn't it?

JH: I remember that game beating Lonborg. That's the way Eddie was. Our deal was that it didn't matter what he said, we had to go out and win games.

ML: Let's get back to the season. When September 10 came around, the Sox were still in the race but had suffered a crushing defeat the day before (*Author's Note: In another national "Game of the Week" on Saturday September 9, Detroit scored seven runs in the 9th inning off Bob Locker, Wilbur Wood, Don McMahon and Roger Nelson wiping out a 3-0 Sox lead. The runs came with one out*). A lot of folks including some of the media in Chicago were saying the Sox were dead. You started Game #1 of the Sunday double header. First off, under the circumstances of a pennant race and the pressure resulting from the loss the day before, how were you able to focus and keep your concentration? That takes a remarkable person to be able to do that.

JH: I never recalled having any pressure on me when I pitched games. It didn't matter what the circumstances were or what was at stake. When the game started I was in a different world. I'd be on the bench thinking 'OK, I've got to face someone like Harmon Killebrew this inning. How do I want to pitch to him?' Then I'd go out and completely forget who I was pitching to. Next thing I'd realize I'd be back in the dugout having faced Killebrew. I just blocked everything out and pitched. I got in what guys call a zone.

Early in my career I was always thinking about how to pitch guys, I was always concerned about things like 'I've got to pitch this guy on the corner' or 'I've got to keep the ball down,' and it was affecting me. I'd start choking the ball and it just wasn't moving for me. One day I was throwing on the side and Hoyt Wilhelm came up to me and said, "Why don't you throw like this in a game?" I asked what he meant and he said, "just throw in a game like you're doing now...relaxed and easy. Stop worrying about hitting the corners. Just keep the ball down and let it do the work for you." So I said "well I'll try it." I went out and won six in a row.

ML: The Sox got you five runs in the first inning so at least some of that pressure was removed, but as the game went on you kept retiring Tiger hitters. Bill Freehan reached in the 3rd inning on a ball that hit him. Eddie Mathews reached in the 5th when Ken Boyer fumbled a ground ball but that was it. Like in 1963 Joe, when do you realize that you had a no-hitter?

JH: I knew what was going on around the 5th inning. I didn't change anything. I knew that we had lost that game the day before. In fact Kenny Boyer and I went out after it. We met Bruce Roberts, the WBBM-TV sports guy for dinner and drinks. He was a good friend and we played golf a lot. We were in a bar and Norm Cash and Eddie Mathews were there. They bought us a drink. To me it was just another day.

ML: At least you didn't have to worry about losing the game unless you fell completely apart. So the first man up in the 9th is Jerry Lumpe and he hits a smash that Wayne Causey had to lunge for at second base. His throw to "Cotton" Nash just got him (*Author's Note: Nash was put in as a defensive replacement to start the 9th inning. He was 6-6, a former All-America basketball player at the University of Kentucky and one of the few men to play professionally in two sports; with the Sox and Twins in major league baseball, the Lakers and Warriors of the NBA and the Kentucky Colonels of the ABA.*) Do you remember that play?

JH: I threw a fastball that caught more of the plate than I wanted it to and he hit it good. Wayne made a great play, a diving stop. I'm glad that Lumpe didn't run very well!

ML: Bill Heath bounced out to Don Buford for out number two. The last guy up was Dick McAuliffe. According to J.C. Martin (*Author's Note: The Sox catcher that day*) when he came out to the mound to ask you how you wanted to pitch him you said something along the lines of 'you called the first 8 2/3rd innings... you finish it up.' What do you remember about that final at bat?

JH: I was concerned because Dick was a scrappy hitter and he could run. I threw him a pitch away and he swung at it and hit it to Ronny Hansen our shortstop. Next thing I know I threw my glove in the air and we were celebrating. You know I don't know where that glove went to... I didn't get it back!

ML: Is it true that you were chewing a wad of Kleenex to relax? Apparently tobacco made you throw up and you didn't like gum.

JH: That's true. Nellie Fox tried to get me to chew tobacco. I used to tell people I tried it 20 times and threw up 21 times! I didn't like gum. I started chewing Kleenex when I went to a movie one day. It was an action movie. I couldn't tell you the name of it now. I had some popcorn and was using the napkins to wipe my hands. I just thought I'd try it so I put it in my mouth. Started doing it since then. The word got out that I used it that way and before long the Kleenex Company used to deliver a big box full of their packages to me before the start of the year.

ML: According to reports you said your curve was off and that you relied on your sinker. It is a fact that only two outs were recorded that day in the outfield. (*Author's Note: Horlen got sixteen*

ground balls outs in the game.) How does it feel to actually throw a no-hitter, the last one at home a Sox pitcher has ever thrown by the way?

JH: I was aware of the fact that I'm the last Sox pitcher to throw a home no-hitter. Again I was just happy to win the game, we needed it.

ML: Again according to J.C. Martin, a few days later you two were in the locker room when you asked J.C. if the Sox gave him anything for catching the no-hitter. When Martin said they didn't you wrote him a check and according to him said something like, 'I wish it was more.' True story?

JH: Yes. The day after the no-hitter the Sox called me in and tore up my existing deal and gave me a new one. Baseball didn't like it if a team gave a player a bonus, so they ripped up the contract and gave me a new one for the 1967 season. For pitching that game they gave me a thousand dollars.

ML: Not a bad day's work.

JH: I'll say.

ML: You threw to a decent number of catcher's when you were with the Sox. Guys like J.C. and Sherm Lollar, Jerry McNertney, Camilo Carreon, Johnny Romano and Ed Herrmann. Did you have a favorite?

JH: Don't forget Duane Josephson. I'd say J.C. and Ed were the best. I liked J.C. because he did a good job of setting up the target. He called a good game and he was able to throw guys out who were trying to steal on me.

ML: Notoriety came your way after the no-hitter. You wound up on the back of a Wheaties box. Something for the trophy case?

JH: I do have one of those boxes in my trophy case. I've also got the ball from the no-hitter. Some of the jerseys that I wore... signed bats. I think I have something from just about every team I played for going back to the Pony League championship. I've got the plaque from my induction into the Oklahoma State Hall of Fame, I've got a lot of baseball's from the teams I played on as well. I've got the ball from my 1,000th big league strikeout. I also have a replica of the 1972 World Series trophy that Charlie Finley had made for each player.

ML: Getting back to the stretch run of the 1967 season. The Sox also shut out the Tigers in the second game that day behind Cisco Carlos, Bob Locker and Hoyt Wilhelm, so the team was back in the race. Later that same week the Sox would beat Cleveland 1-0 in 17 innings, then 4-0 in 10 innings on a grand slam by Don Buford. The Sox would sweep the Twins the weekend of September 15, including a game where you guys scored four runs in the 9th inning. It seemed that momentum was clearly with the team. How confident at that point was the club that you were going to win the pennant.

JH: Really confident. All the guys were ready to go. We were playing very well.

ML: The Sox then went on their final road trip. Eight games total. They won two of three in Anaheim, and two of three in Cleveland. On September 24, after winning 3-1, the Sox stood at 89-68, one game out, with five games left, two at Kansas City then three at home to Washington. Mike Andrews told me in his interview that when the Red Sox looked at who the Sox had left to play, they felt it was all over, that the pennant would fly in Chicago, but when you guys got to the stadium Tuesday night in K.C. it was raining, the game was cancelled and that changed everything didn't it?

JH: It did. We just came out flat. We didn't hit the ball. (*Author's Note: The Sox suffered a disastrous double header loss by the scores of 5-2 and 4-0. In the two games the Sox made three errors and only collected a total of seven hits. Gary Peters took the loss in Game #1 despite striking out 10 in 5.2 innings. He allowed only one earned run. Horlen allowed three runs in six innings of work in Game #2. He also got tagged with the loss.*)

ML: The common perception is that you and Gary didn't pitch well but the numbers say otherwise. What seems to have cost the Sox was defense and hitting. Also I discovered that you guys had in fact, *three days off* from the time the game ended that Sunday in Cleveland until Wednesday night when you started Game one in Kansas City. That type of layoff in a pennant race is unheard off. Was that a factor?

JH: It could have been. We had just started taking batting practice Tuesday night when a big storm hit the Kansas City area and washed everything out.

ML: The Sox returned home still with a chance although they were going to need help. The final series with Washington opened on Friday night so you guys had still *another* day off. In what perfectly defines the luck of this franchise, the team was eliminated when Tommy John lost 1-0. The loss was caused by a pop up that couldn't be caught in the first inning due to a camera barrier set up by NBC in case the Sox hosted the World Series. (*Author's Note: The play took place in the 1st inning when Senators right fielder Fred Valentine, hit the pop up that Sox first baseman Tommy McCraw couldn't reach due to the camera wall. Valentine then singled in the only run of the game.*) What was the mood in the locker room afterwards, knowing you came so close and many of you guys had already experienced the disappointment of the 1964 chase?

JH: We were beat. We knew it. It was simply a question of playing the final two games. It was our lowest point mentally in the season. To be that close....

I pitched the final game of the year trying to get my 20th win. In fact I singled in two runs and we were leading 2-1 heading into the 7th, then Tommy (John) came in. I remember Washington tied the game when someone hit a ground ball down the line, Tommy (McCraw) picked it up, tagged the guy then dropped the ball! (*Author's Note: With two outs in the 7th, future Sox*

outfielder Ed “The Creeper” Stroud bounced the ball down the line to McCraw. Bob Locker was the Sox pitcher. When McCraw dropped it, Ken McMullen scored the tying run. McMullen led off the 7th inning with a double off Horlen. Washington would wind up winning 4-3.) So I never did that the win.

ML: I guess the last disappointment to you personally came when you lost the Cy Young award to Boston’s Jim Lonborg even though your numbers were statically better in most categories. What was your reaction when you got the news?

JH: I didn’t even know the results until I heard about them. I wasn’t even thinking about winning. I did find out though that one of the reasons I didn’t win the award is because one of the team’s own writers didn’t vote for me. Every city that had a team had two writers who were allowed to vote. But this person didn’t vote for me and I think I remember why.

A few years before, I think, I was pitching in Los Angeles and I was really struggling. The Sox got me some runs early and it was something like 5-3 or 6-4 in the last of the 5th inning. Al Lopez then came out and replaced me before I could finish the inning and maybe get the win. I’m back in the clubhouse and this writer comes up to me and asks “so how pissed off are you that Lopez took you out early?” I told him that “I’m not pissed off but disappointed because I wish I could have finished the inning and maybe got the win.” So I’m changing clothes when a minute or so later Lopez comes out of his office, he starts pushing me into my locker and calling me every name in the book. I said, “Al, what’s wrong?”

He starts shouting “I’m the guy who’s running this team and I’ll decide who plays you blankety blank!” “So and so (name of writer) said that you were pissed off that I took you out.” I said “Al I am *not* pissed off, I told that guy I was disappointed that I couldn’t finish the inning and maybe get the win.” That calmed Al down a bit although he was still saying “well I’m the guy who makes those decisions.”

I guess that Al then went back to the writer and got all over him. That’s probably why he didn’t vote for me. All I know is that writer got a lot of guys in trouble that way.

(Author’s Note: In 1967 Horlen won 19 games, led the league with six shutouts and led the league with a 2.06 ERA. He started 35 games and threw 258 innings. Lonborg led the league with 22 wins, strikeouts with 246 and started 39 games. He threw 273 innings with an ERA of 3.18. Joe told me the name of the writer who didn’t vote for him under the promise that I would not reveal it in this interview. Older Sox fans would certainly recognize the individual in question.)

ML: In some ways Joe you did some of your best pitching in 1968 and 1969. Even though the Sox were a bad team you still posted double figure wins and your ERA in 1968 was 2.37. Given that you had never experienced a season where the team lost more games than it won, how difficult were those 68, 69 and 1970 seasons?

JH: I had only one goal and that was that I never wanted to embarrass myself out there on the mound. I had pride, that's the way I was my whole career. I couldn't control how good or bad the team was, I could only control myself.

Speaking of 1968 reminds me of another story. We were in Boston and I had a one run lead in the 8th inning. Eddie Stanky had already been thrown out of the game earlier. Stanky always used to tell us pitchers that when we played the Red Sox not to let Yastrzemski beat us. So they have a guy on base, "Yaz" is up, and our pitching coach Marv Grissom comes out to talk to me. He said "Eddie wanted to remind you not to let Yaz beat us." I said "OK". I threw him a fastball up and in and he hit it out. We lost the game 3-2. After the game Stanky dropped names on me like you wouldn't believe! He said I was older than God among other things. He said if I was 19 years old I would have thrown it by him, but that was the trouble, I wasn't 19 years old anymore! (laughing) (*Author's Note: Carl would hit a two run home run off Horlen in the 7th inning at Fenway Park on June 7, 1968.*)

ML: 1971 was your last season with the Sox. As I recall didn't you have a knee injury of some type that really bothered you that season? And I believe your injury opened the door to making Wilbur Wood a starting pitcher.

JH: That's true. It was the last exhibition game of 1971; we were in Scottsdale, Arizona playing the Cubs. From there we were going to go to Oakland to open the season. I pitched four innings that day then came up to bat against Kenny Holtzman. I knocked one off the wall and was sliding into second base. I was going to do a pop-up slide and when I threw my left leg back as I hit the dirt I heard a loud pop in my knee. The leg was locked into a ninety degree angle. I just couldn't bend it back. There was a hospital across the street where it was x-rayed and examined. The doctor said it looked like I tore some cartilage.

So the Cubs were going back to Chicago to open their season and the Sox set it up so that I could fly back on their plane. That way our doctor could look at my leg the next morning. After the game I met them at the airport, I'm on crutches mind you, and we had a three hour wait while they were fixing some problem with the plane. Jack Brickhouse and Vince Lloyd come up to me and we start talking and as we're doing this they start buying me beers. The plane is finally ready and we get on it. I can't sit down because of my leg so I talk to Joe Pepitone and Ron Santo all the way back to Chicago. Meanwhile I'm still having a few beers and the crutches weren't working very well! (laughing)

We get back to Chicago and a guy picked me up and took me to Mercy Hospital. It's about 12:30 or one o'clock in the morning by now. I hadn't eaten anything since breakfast. I've got ice bags on my knee, I can't sleep, the sheets are wet from the ice and I'm miserable. About seven AM, our doctor shows up, we do some tests and the knee does have some torn cartilage. So he says

that he'll schedule the surgery the next day. I ask him if I can get something to eat and he says "you haven't eaten yet?" I said that I hadn't eaten since Sunday morning and it was now Monday morning. He said, "Let me check something." He comes back and said that since I hadn't eaten anything that he was going to do the surgery right now. So we did. (*Author's Note: Joe would come back in time to pitch in 34 games, start 18, win eight and save two.*)

ML: You went to spring training in 1972 with the team but right before the strike delayed the opening you were released. Do you remember what happened?

JH: We were playing the last spring training game, it was against Pittsburgh and before it started a meeting was held in the clubhouse. It was all the guys on the 40 man roster plus 15 or so Triple-A guys. Stu Holcomb (*Author's Note: Then the Sox vice-president who replaced Leo Breen when both Chuck Tanner and Roland Hemond were hired in September 1970.*) was speaking to all of the players, it was five days before the union meeting in Dallas where all the player rep's were going to vote on whether to strike or not. I was the Sox player rep. He was saying how there was nothing to strike over, how all the other G.M.'s couldn't understand why we would want to do this. He said "I guarantee you all of you guys will play long enough to get your pension." At that time you had to play five years in the major leagues to qualify for something. I raised my hand and asked if I could take a poll right there. Holcomb said fine. I said "everyone who has five years in the major leagues raise your hand." There were only a handful of guys. He kept talking about the fact that many of us would be good enough to play a full 10 years in the majors. I asked if I could take another poll. "How many guys have played 10 years in the majors?" I was the only guy in that clubhouse who played that long. My point was most guys don't get even five years of big league service time let alone 10.

The Sox put me on waivers the very next day! It turned out that season that according to Marvin Miller, 16 of the 24 player rep's were either traded or released.

ML: So how did you wind up in Oakland for your final season?

JH: I went to the Dallas meeting as the Sox player rep. There wasn't enough time to elect someone else. I had my bags with me and after the meeting I was just going to go back home and call it a career. I was in the hotel lobby when Reggie Jackson came up to me.

He was the A's player rep. Reggie asked me what was wrong, why did the Sox waive me? I told him what I knew and he said, "You know we've been trying to trade for you all spring. The Sox said they didn't want to let you go." He gave me Charlie Finley's private telephone number and said to call him that Charlie would want to talk with me.

So I called Mr. Finley and we spoke. He asked me about being waived and how my legs were. I told him that they were fine. He said "I've been keeping up with the strike. It's not going to last more than 10 days. After five days we're going to send you a plane ticket to come to Oakland. We want you to work out for us and if you're O.K. we'll sign you." So I did and pitched five innings against the University of California baseball team. The A's then signed me for the season.

ML: At least you had a chance to get to the playoffs and win a World Series but was it strange coming back to play in Chicago as a member of the opposition?

JH: It was a little different after all those years but I just wanted to pitch well against them...and I did! (*Author's Note: Joe appeared in five games against the Sox in 1972. He threw a total of 12.2 innings allowing two runs.*)

My job with the A's was to spot start or pitch long relief. I remember we went to Arlington to play a game; it was like a hundred degrees outside with a hundred per cent humidity. "Blue Moon" Odom left the game early and I came in. I may have finished it up and we won. (*Author's Note: The game was on May 29, 1972. Horlen pitched 5.2 innings in relief and got the win in a 4-1 decision.*) That was my job and it was satisfying at the end of the season to have the players and coaches say that I gave them exactly what they needed.

ML: When I think of Joe Horlen I think of a guy who wasn't the biggest guy and who didn't throw the hardest but who could throw just about any pitch he needed, *where* he needed it, *when* he needed it. Does that sum you up pretty accurately?

JH: Well my fastball wasn't that slow. Today when you hear of guys throwing a certain speed you have to remember that the radar guns that the scouts use measure the ball as it's leaving the pitcher's hand. That's not the speed the ball arrives at the plate...that's why those guns are always off. One time the Sox set up a radar box at home plate and asked the pitchers to throw at it. When my pitches went through they were clocked at 91-92 miles an hour at home plate.

ML: In 2002 the Sox asked you and J.C. Martin to come back to Chicago and throw out the first pitch to him for the home opener. It was a very nice gesture by the Sox. Tell me about that experience.

JH: It was great. I was called by one of the Sox representatives and he said that since it was the 25th anniversary season of the no-hitter they wanted me to throw out the first ball. Then the guy asked me who my catcher was for that game. He didn't know so I told him it was J.C. and they got him to come to Chicago to catch me.

ML: You been known to hang out with a rather famous basketball coach in Texas don't you?

JH: Yes I do spend some time with Bobby Knight. He's a great guy and a big baseball fan. A mutual friend introduced us when we all went hunting a few years ago. When I met him he knew more about me with the Sox then even I remembered! Bobby is kind enough to invite me up to Lubbock every so often to take in a game and he usually signs basketballs and such for me that I donate to charity auctions and functions.

ML: 10 years is a long time to be with one team in one city. As time has passed Joe what do you recall about a decade spent pitching on the South Side?

JH: It was a great time for me, a very special time. Chicago was a great place to play and the Sox were a great organization. I made a number of friends, people that to this day I visit when I come back to Chicago. One of the people I lived with was a doctor who lived in Hillside. I'd stay with his family when my family wasn't with me. To this day I keep in touch with his children. We often talk about the cabin that he had up in Green Lake, Wisconsin. Anytime you wanted to you could go up there and spend a few days, you didn't even have to ask him. He was known by a number of Chicago athletes and he made them the same offer. I remember seeing Bobby Hull up there. One time I visited and Mr. and Mrs. Tony Esposito were there as well. I just couldn't have asked for a better time playing baseball.



